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Subject: How to Learn About God.

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PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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HOW TO LEARN ABOUT GOD.

“Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.”—Jer. ix. 23, 24.

It is not to be understood that one is to have no satisfaction in the consciousness of learning, of skill, of power in its various kinds, or of riches, but that these are not to be regarded as the highest enjoyments, nor as the consummation of our ideas of good fortune. We are to have our distinctive pride and gladness far higher than in such matters as these.

A correct and personal knowledge of God is a source of more happiness, of more power, of more beauty, and is therefore a subject more fit to glory in, than any other—a proposition which you do not believe, but which is thoroughly true. Some may know it; but the most of those who call themselves Christians do not.

We shall come back to a consideration of this practical aspect after some foregoing consideration of the human knowledge of God.

In every age of the world of which we have any record, the best ideas of that age have been grouped together and called *God*. It is said that God has revealed himself to men, and that there has been, from the earliest periods, a divine representation which transcended the measure of human faculty. In some sense this is true; for the passage which I read to you in the opening service this morning, and which dates far back—almost to the beginning of literature—contains a representation of God in his goodness, in his domestic relations, if I may so say, as well as in his justice, and in the administration of pain and joy as instruments of government. There is nothing to be added and nothing to be subtracted from this picture of the divine nature which hangs back in the vista of time at the very opening of things.

Nevertheless, in regard to the world at large, and all its races, it is true that in every age the best things which men conceived of were wrought together, and constituted the popular or theological idea of God.

When men lived in their basilar nature, when power meant control over the brute beasts and over men, and when the warrior was the type of the highest manhood, then God was the god Thor, or his equivalent. The God of that time was some thundering Jupiter. The presentation of Jehovah which was then most common, was one which represented the force-side of divinity. But as, with the progress of life, society became more dependent upon law and moral influence than upon absolute force, and men began to be knit together in communities, a new conception arose; and you shall find that then all these ideas were transferred to the popular conception of divinity, and that God was represented no longer as a mere absolute sovereign, doing what he would, but as one who governed by law and motive.

As, looking at men comprehensively, civilization and religion still wrought upon the human mind, and the sweet amenities of the household began to increase, and home began to blossom like the orchard, and to bear on every bough fruit good to the eye and to the taste, so there began to creep into the notion of God the domestic elements. Tenderness and pity and compassion began to be represented in it. But as in the household there breaks out in every mother's life vicarious suffering; as every parent in some sense uses his life, gives it, for the benefit of the helpless and the ignorant; as in exigencies the great drama of life is enacted in every house; as all that are good in the family wait patiently upon the wandering and the lost, yielding up their several good, as it were, in order to reclaim them; so, at last, in the later days of divine disclosure, there came to be the conception of a suffering God: not one who in his original nature was constructed to suffer, but one who was so full of love and pity that he was the type and original of that sacrifice which we see manifested in detail and imperfectly in the household for the reclamation of children.

The nearer a man is to the fruit—to maturity—in his spiritual condition, the more he inherits that nature by which he suffers to make others happy. The nearer a man is to the ideal of manhood, the more willing he is to suffer himself to save others from suffering. The law of suffering runs through the universe; but it changes just at the point which divides between true manhood and that animalhood on which manhood is grafted in this mortal state. On one side, the law of suffering is a law by which men make themselves

oppressors, treading down their fellowmen, as the vintner treads the grapes in the wine-vat; it is a law of selfishness by which men grab and gather in, acting centripetally, and cause all things to rush to themselves. But at that point where man begins to approach the other side, or the divine nature, the reverse takes place, and the law of suffering becomes a law by which men give themselves for the sake of others. The mother is willing to watch with the child night after night; she is willing to work with the child; she is willing to toil for the child; she is willing to suffer that the child may be made happy. There are thousands and thousands who are gladly spending their lives, and taking only the remunerations of love from day to day, in the hope that they may put their children where they will not be narrowly shut up, restrained, burdened with toil. And as this conception of manhood develops, it begins to appear in the notions of God which men entertain.

I shall now, perhaps, be better understood than if I had stated it at first, when I say that the knowledge of God is not a thing which can be fixed in the beginning, except in words; that in its very nature, the knowledge of God among men must, to a large extent, be progressive; and that it must follow the development of the race itself. As our knowledge of God consists in the inclosure by that name of the noblest qualities of which we have any conception, or which fall out in human experience; as we gather these qualities, and group them, and then lay on them the scale of the infinite, and exalt them to the sphere of government, and call them *God*; so the knowledge of God goes on increasing with the development of the race of mankind. Especially it augments as men grow wiser, purer, more self-denying, more heroic. Then they transfer these interpreting elements to the divine character; which to their eyes begins to glow in a wider sphere, with beams more full of light, and less filled with heat that smites or destroys. The character of God, in our apprehension of it, ameliorates, and grows more beautiful, more attractive, and richer in every element, just in proportion as the race from which we get our notion of moral excellence increases in moral excellencies. There has been, and there is recognized in the word of God from beginning to end, a steady progress in the disclosure of the divine nature; and we see that in the thoughts respecting God among men there has been a gradual augmentation of the conception of the divine character, arising from the process which I have already delineated.

If it should seem to any of you that this view would set aside your accustomed notions of the disclosure of God—those which you have derived from the Bible; if you should say, as many of

you will, that this is relying on human reason ; that God in ancient times, by the mouth of his holy prophets, and in later times by the mouth of his son Jesus Christ, and still later by the mouth of the apostles, described the divine character ; that it was set up as a thing to which nothing was to be added, and from which nothing was to be subtracted ; if you say that this view of progressive development contradicts the conception which the Bible contains, then I say, It does, and it does not. It may, but it is not necessary that it should.

The alphabet being given, the whole English literature is contained in it ; but although a man knows the alphabet, he does not necessarily know the whole English literature. If you take the alphabet of God, which is found in the Bible, it does not follow that everybody can read all that that alphabet can spell.

I go into a gallery where there are illustrious persons hung in portraiture. I see one that I am attracted to, and I look upon it, and I know this much—that it is a man. I know that it is a man of beauty, or, lacking beauty, indicating great intellectual development and power of brain. A number of such external things I know of him, but nothing more. By and by, some one says to me, “His name is Goethe.” Ah ! instantly a vision springs up in my mind. I have read of Goethe. I know his poems. I know his dramas. I know much of the whole German literature which he has created. And the moment I hear his name, and associate it with that portrait, it assumes new life. It is a hundred times more to me than it was before. I say to myself, “Then that is Goethe, is it? Well—well—well”; and all these *wells* merely mean that I am thinking, and gathering together all my scattered knowledge, and concentrating it on that effigy. I do not know him personally, though I know him as well as a book could interpret him to me. But suppose I had been in Germany ; suppose I had been invited to his house ; had seen him in the morning, at noon and at night ; at the table, familiarly ; with his manuscripts, in his study ; suppose I had seen him when topics came before him for discussion, or in his intercourse with men ; suppose I had seen him surrounded by little children, and seen how they affected him ; suppose I had seen how noble personages affected him ; suppose I had seen him in moments of calmness and silence and reverie ; or at funerals ; or at great public rejoicings ; in all those moods and circumstances which go to show exactly what a man is ; suppose I had *lived* with him, and seen the coruscation, the whole play, of his soul, would I not then have a knowledge of him which no portrait could give me? Having gained this larger knowledge of him, I say, “I never

knew Goethe before"; but one exclaims, "You never knew Goethe before? Yes you did. I pointed him out to you in such a gallery, at such a time; and now you say you never knew him before!" But would it not be true?

You know many things about your wife's relations; but you have never seen them. The summer vacation comes round, and you go to visit them. You go wondering what sort of folks they are. You have heard a great deal about them, but you do not feel that you know them. The father, the mother, that brother, that sister, and the other persons—you go full of curiosity concerning them. There is much about them that you have yet to find out. And when you go into the household and see them, there is that in the pulsations of life itself which no portrait can represent. No painter paints on canvas as the presence of living people paints on your consciousness. You knew a multitude of facts in regard to these relatives, but the knowledge which you had was as nothing compared to the knowledge which you have now, after having been with them in the household, and communed with them.

It is true that in the Bible there is much sublime portraiture representing the character of God; but, after all, no man knows God until he has personally found him out in such a way as that he feels that God has touched him. It is the communion, it is the soul-feeling, it is the influence which comes from the conscious presence of God, that brings him into acquaintanceship.

Therefore, every man must have a God of his own. You have the Bible-God; but he belongs to everybody. Every man's personal identity, every man's character, differs from that of every other man; and every man's own self is the medium through which he interprets the divine character, and takes different parts of it, and in different proportions, and with different emphasis—as I will show in a moment. No man can say, "I know God as a *living* God," except so far as he has interpreted him out of his own living consciousness.

The conception of God, primarily, then, depends upon the attributes and the qualities of the divine being which have been catalogued for us; but our real, vital thought of God depends far more upon proportion and emphasis. You may take a list of attributes and make out of them a thousand men, and the list shall be the same. Thus, you may say of a man, "He is truthful, tender, faithful, generous, industrious, thoughtful." All those qualities are true of a thousand men. They do not discriminate one man from another. Here is a man who is truthful, industrious, faithful, thoughtful, active; but he is a painter, and his life comes through the sense of beauty in form and color. Another man, with precisely the

same general qualities, is a merchant. Another is a statesman. Another is a mechanic. Another is a voyager. One is full of delicacy. He has a woman's nature. Another man, with just these same qualities, is robust and sturdy. He is trained in the more vigorous exercises of life. You see, you cannot discriminate between one man and another merely by the recapitulation of these qualities.

Now, suppose you say of God, "He is just, true, righteous, pure, benevolent, lovely." Those qualities being enumerated, there will probably be in this audience a thousand different conceptions of the personality which they go to make up.

What are the circumstances which will make this difference in your conceptions of the divine nature? I will explain. Some there are here who are far more sensible to physical qualities than others. The sublimity of power is to their thought one of the chief divine attributes. God is omnipotent. That idea touches them. He is omniscient. Their eyes sparkle when they think of that. He is omnipresent. They have a sense of that. He is majestic. He has wondrous power. He fills the heavens. He thunders in summer. He breaks down the forests by his tornadoes. He sinks ships by his storms. According to their conception he is God of all the earth. None can resist his might. He doth what he will. He is supreme in the councils of heaven and among the people of the earth. There are a great many of you who feel, "That is the kind of God that I want—a God who has substance and power in him." That is your sense of God. If you only have such a God, you are satisfied.

Another person wants a scientific God. He says, "I perceive that there is a law of light, a law of heat, a law of electricity; I see that everything is fashioned by law; and my idea of God is that he must be supreme in science; that there are to be found in him all those qualities which science is interpreting to me." His God will be just, generous, faithful, but he will be just, generous, faithful, after the fashion of some Agassiz, or some Cuvier, or some Faraday. His God will be some form of being lifted up to great supremacy in the direction of science.

Another man conceives of God from the domestic side. It is the mother-nature that he thinks of—the nature that is full of gentleness; full of kindness; full of sympathy; full of sweetness; full of elevated tastes and relishes; full of songs; full of all manner of joy-producing qualities. His conception of God will fill his mind full of little glinting lights scarcely worthy to be described in language, but going to make up his ideal.

Another, who is an artist, will feel after the God of the rainbow—a God of beauty.

So every person will be dependent upon the most sensitive parts of his own soul for his interpretation of God. What is it that makes one flower blue and another scarlet? No flower reflects all the light. If a flower is purple it absorbs a part and reflects the rest. If it is blue it absorbs some of the parts and reflects others. The same is true if it is red. And as it is with the colors of flowers, so it is with our conception of God. What you are susceptible of, and what you are sensitive to, in the divine nature, largely determines what your conception of God is. There are many elements which are common to the conceptions which all persons form of God; but each individual puts emphasis on that part of the character of God which his own mind is best fitted to grasp.

For instance, God is said to be a God of justice, of truth and of benevolence. Now, which of those elements is first? Which governs the others? It makes a difference which qualities are subordinate, and which are predominant. It makes a difference which governs and which is governed. There are several parts to every piece of music, and it makes a difference which of these parts is the light and which is the shade of harmony. And so it is in the conception of character.

We see this among men. We know a man to be good and kind; but he is stubborn. He is like those geodes—stones which are rough on the outside, but which, if you break them, are full of crystals. We know men who are outwardly hard and rough, and force their way through life. At home, in the domestic sphere, they are full of sweetness and beauty; but the sternness dominates, and the beauty is subordinate, and only fills the chinks of life. Another man is stern; but the element of benevolence dominates and rules in him. Everything else is subordinate to that. The same qualities may exist in different persons, and yet their characters may differ, from the fact that the emphasis is put upon one quality in one, and upon another quality in another.

One theology holds that God is a supreme Judge and Lawgiver. It holds that he is just and true first; and that whatever is in him of goodness and kindness and gentleness is to be considered after he has had full swing of those attributes. The theology which forms that conception of God I call the High Calvinistic.

Another theology holds that though God is just, he is preëminently a God of goodness and love—love outshining; love filling the heavens; love pouring itself out as the sun pours itself over all the earth; love that, like the light, searches everywhere, leaving nothing unglorified; love that calls into life and beauty the very mosses which have only the rock for a mother; love that makes the

stick radiant ; love that makes the very barren sand beautiful ; love that speaks through the dew-drop and the rain-drop ; love that makes everything radiant and beautiful in all the earth. Let that be the first thought. Then in carrying out, in exercising, this love, there is a necessity of pain. Love does not scruple to give pain any more than a mother does. If to save bitterness, bitterness needs to be taken into the stomach of the child, bitterness must be administered ; and it will be administered in love. If to restore the child's health it needs to be starved, it is starved ; and love starves it. If the child, for the sake of its disposition needs to have some physical help to overcome its temper, help it shall have ; and it is love that gives it.

It makes a great deal of difference which end first you put attributes in the divine character. If God is first sternly just, and then suffers and is kind, that is one sort of God. If he is first loving, and then in the service of love is stern, and severe even, that is another kind of God. I hold that the emphasis which you put upon the divine attributes determines the character of God in your mind ; and when you say, " I hold that God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, just, good, true, faithful, benevolent," you have said what this man says, what that man says, and what I say. We are all agreed, then, are we ? Oh, no ! If I could take a Daguerrean picture of the conception which each man forms of God, it would be found that one puts more emphasis on justice than love, and that another puts more emphasis on love than on justice. It would be found that one emphasizes one attribute, and another its opposite ; and that the conception which each one forms of the divine character depends upon the quality which he emphasizes most.

There are persons who say, " It needs nothing but clear teaching to have everybody agree upon the character of God." You might as well say that one man could drain the whole Atlantic Ocean, or breathe the total atmosphere above his head. God is infinite ; and there is so much of him that it takes the sum of hundreds of men's thoughts put together to begin to touch the hem of his garment. God, the everlasting Father—do you suppose that you can comprehend him, any one of you ? You can take in a little of the knowledge of him, and it is true as far as it goes ; but it goes only a little way. It is enough to be of service to you, it is enough to guide you, it is enough to comfort you ; but it is only a paragraph of the great volume to which it belongs.

Is there anything more sad than to see two persons living together, one having a great and rich nature which the other is not

able to understand? I have seen husbands and wives who were ill-matched in this way. I have in my mind such a couple. They have both gone to heaven. I hope that it is different with them there; but on earth she was radiant and royal in all those qualities of womanhood which make one thank God; and he was a small pattern of a man who ran after her with a kind of admiration for what she knew, and with a vague impression that there was something about her that he did not know—which was very true.

I see people running after God very much so. All of us have a conception of some parts of his nature; we have a dim understanding of some of his attributes; we see him through a glass darkly; but by and by, when we go home to heaven, and only then, we shall see him face to face.

It is not possible, my brethren, that there should be absolute unity. One man will have his picture of God, and another man will have his, and another will have his, and they will all be true, but they will all be partial. They will be true in the same sense that what is true of one leaf of an apple tree is true of the whole orchard. They will be true in the same sense in which a little bit of landscape which you pick out from nature and put on your canvas is true of the whole of nature. It does not represent nature. Nature is bigger than that. It has more sides to it than that. One landscape is of rocks; another is of sand on the sea-shore; another is of the tranquil sea; another is of the glacier; another is of fields and forests. Nature is complex, and cannot all be represented by a single picture. And so the whole of God transcends the conception of any one human being. We know in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then we shall know as we are known. We shall see Him as he is. Such is the interpretation of the Word of God.

The next question which you would naturally propound to me, is, "Since these are the ways in which God is conceived of by men, how shall each fashion in himself the living God?" I call the Bible a picture gallery. It is an historical record which is open to all; but it behooves us each to have some conception which we call our *God*, *our Father's God*, *the living God*. I know of no other way than that which has been practiced by the race from the beginning. I know of no other way than for you, in filling out the catalogue which the word of God gives you of the elements of the divine nature, to employ the actual perceptions and experiences of this life, in order to kindle before your mind those qualities which otherwise would be abstract to you.

For instance, we are to know "the love of Christ which passeth

knowledge." This has seemed almost contradictory to many persons. They have so low an experience of love in the world that they have no color on their palette with which to draw the portrait of that part of God. A person who has seen love in human life; who has seen the wealth of it; its lights and shades; its heights and depths; its beauty; its permanence—such a person has a rich fountain of inspiration.

Blessed be those men to whom God gave a mother that stands in their imagination and memory as the Virgin Mary stands to the worshiping Catholic, the sum of all goodness! Woe be to him who has never had a sister, a wife or a mother, who was to him a perpetual suggestion of the nobleness, the sweetness, and the delicacy of love. When I think of God, I think of the goodness that I have known in such a one, and in such a one, and in such a one. When I have brought to me some rare tale of devoted love, the light of it does not stop with the person about whom it is spoken: it flashes out toward God; and so I get an interior view of the divine nature. The glowing mass I cannot understand; but I transfer this little spark out of the household to the divine nature, and give it infinite proportions; and then I say to myself, "Oh, that is the nature of God!"

I know of parents who live on the cross perpetually. I know of parents who have one, two, three children; and I speak the truth, I lie not, when I say that the greatest joy which could be borne to them would be the message, "Your child is dead." What a life is theirs! And yet, I know there is no kindness too great for them to show toward those children. I know that there is a patience which never wears out. I know that those who are good do not receive a tithe of the yearning and sympathy which those who are bad receive. I see what the heart of great natures is when in pursuit of those who are out of the way and are in danger of perishing. I see what the baptism of love is. I see what its tenacity is. I see what its fertility is. I see how it will suffer and watch and work, and never fail till the sea dries up, till the clouds are gone, till the universe burns. "Love never faileth." Whenever I get a hint of this, I lift it up and transfer it to the character of God, and say, "Is that then a conception of the divine love and mercy of Jesus Christ? Is that redeeming love? Is that the thought of the grandeur of which we get a hint, a suggestion from our experience among men, lifted up into the infinite sphere, and made majestic as God himself?"

The communion of the Holy Ghost; the indicelling of God; having loved his own, he loved them unto the end; where I am,

there ye may be also—those soul-caressing words of the Lord Jesus Christ are in the literature of love without a parallel, and must always be. I cherish all those moments in which I am conscious of the most heroic and worshipful love to those who are as near and dear to me as life. I sew them with golden thoughts to me. I weave my life into theirs. I am strong because of them. I should be weak without them.

What the inspiration of music is in the household, that is love in the economy of the soul. I know what the bright days and the golden hours of love are. When, therefore, Christ says that he loves, I take the most exquisite, the sweetest, the most refined and delicate sentiment of love that I have seen or felt or dreamed of, and I say, "All this is but the beginning of that love which goes on in the divine nature, pulsing through the universe, lasting forever and forever, and which will round out the future, redeeming the race. So I get a conception of the royalty of God in Christ Jesus which puts me in sympathy with the apostle when he speaks of the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of Christ which passes knowledge—intellectual knowledge.

Suppose, then, that you have built up in your mind, by some such process as this, a personal God—a God of your own—who fills the heaven with the best things you can conceive of, to which you are perpetually adding from the stores of your daily experience? for it seems to me that God is a name which becomes more and more by reason of the things which you add to it. Every element, every combination of elements, every development which carries with it a sweeter inspiration than it has been your wont to experience, you put inside of that name; and you call it *God*. You are forever gathering up the choicest and most beautiful phases of human life; and with these you build your God. And then you have a living God adapted to your consciousness and personality.

Now, let me ask you—for I come back to my text (a sermon should always have a text at one end or the other, and this sermon has one at the last end)—let me ask you whether it is not a good text to stand on.

"Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom."

A man who has D.D. or LL.D. to his name; a man who bears the title, F.R.S. or Ph.D., is apt to glory in his wisdom. Why, he is a *savant*! He is a philosopher! He is world-renowned. If he take a ship to go abroad the papers proclaim it, and tidings of his approach reach the foreign shore before he does; and when he lands, the people in the street look at him—for there is a world of impertinent curiosity; and they point him out, and say, "Do

you know who that is?" He is bathed in people's observation. Does not a man rejoice in that? A great many do.

"Neither let the mighty man glory in his might."

"Who can touch me? I do not owe anybody. The law cannot touch me. I have committed no offense. I have a vast estate. There are no bounds to my resources. I have the presidency of that great corporation. I am one of its chief managers. I can just touch one of these springs, and control the whole State, and all the party." A man takes the paper in the morning, and reads, and strokes his beard, and says to himself, "Grand things stand where I stand. I wield a mighty power. I rejoice to think that I am such a strong man." A great many men do rejoice in their might.

"Let not the rich man glory in his riches."

If that were obeyed, it would upset New York in one twenty-four hours. A rich man not glory in his riches! A rich man not hang all the insignia of vanity on the outside of his house so as to make everybody stop before it and exclaim, "Who lives there?" A rich man not fill the inside of his house full of everything that is costly and beautiful, so that when a person comes in, at every step something shall say to him, "You must stop and look at me"! A rich man not surround himself with all those things which gratify his vanity! A rich man not rejoice in his riches! A man be so rich that he is able to throw out money by the handful and never miss it; a man have riches that come in as tides do along the whole line of the sea, and not rejoice in it! A man be rich, and not feel contempt for poor folks! A man walk with the consciousness that there are only three men in the nation who can begin to compare with him in wealth, and not rejoice in his riches!

It is right for a man in a subordinate way to rejoice, if he be wise—although there are some very hard things said of men who are wise in their own conceit. It may not be wrong for a man in a subordinate way to rejoice in his might. If a man is six feet high, he cannot, for the sake of humanity, think that he is only three feet. If a man has the power of creating and combining and managing, he cannot help knowing it. You might as well expect that a white man would not think that he was white. A mighty man may recognize his might; but there is something higher than might. There is something higher than wisdom. A rich man has a right to recognize the blessings of wealth—for wealth brings great blessings with it to those who know how to temper prosperity with manliness. A man has a right to rejoice, especially, when his wealth represents, not craft and cunning, but patient industry long continued, and the wise adaptation of means to an end. Some men who are rich

have a right to say, "When I came to New York I did not own a dollar; but now I own a hundred thousand dollars; and there is not a dollar of it that ever caused a man to shed a tear. There is not a dollar of it that can rise up in the judgment day and say to me, 'You stained me with dishonesty.'" Such a man has a right to feel some pride in his riches—especially if he administers them so as that they will develop in him something higher.

Now and then we are brought to the edge of the great invisible realm, and then we are made to feel that we need something besides wisdom, something besides might, and something besides riches. When a man lies sick in his house, feeling that all the world is going away from him, what can riches do for him? It can be of but little service to him then.

When a man is fifty years of age, and he has large estates, and a high reputation as a citizen, if he is going to leave the world, what can his wealth do for him? If he knows that he is going fast toward the great invisible sphere, does he not need something to hold him up when the visible shall have broken down in this life? In lonely, friendless hours; in hours of sadness; in hours when we have a consciousness of our fallibility and of our failings; in hours of fear and remorse; in hours when some beloved one goes from us whose going is to us like the going of an angel; in hours when the cradle stands empty, and when the house, that used to be vexed with too much noise, is too still—a world too still; in hours when those on whom we had put our pride, and the horoscope of whose prosperity we proudly had drawn, are cast down, and, as in a moment, the stay and hope of our life is gone—in such hours what is there in riches that can afford relief?

The great emergencies of your life make it needful that you should have something more than wisdom and riches and skill and strength. You need a God. You need to believe that there is a providence that takes care of things, and that you are included in it. You need to believe that over against fate and crime and necessity there is a God who has a loving heart. You need to have such personal communion with him that you can say, "Whom shall I have but thee? Whom shall I desire beside thee? Thou art the chiefest among ten thousand, and the one altogether lovely." You need something stronger than wealth, wiser than philosophy, sweeter than human love, mightier than time and nature: you need God. For when flesh and heart fail, then he is the strength of our soul, and our salvation forever.

Brethren, I ask not whether your thought of God is of this or

that school of theology. What I ask is this: Does it lift you up in trouble? Does it purify your soul? Does it comfort you in bereavement? Does it carry you through temptations, blameless? Does it make death itself seem to you as the very pearly gate of heaven? Is your thought of God yours? and can you say to him, "Thou art my God"? If so, then you have what the world cannot take away from you; and you are more blessed than any outward fortune can make you; but if you are without God and without hope in the world, what will you do in trouble? What will you do in sickness? What will you do in death? How will you go into the unknown future unacquainted with its language, without knowledge of its governor, a stranger?

I bring to you the disclosure of God in his Word. But it is to be brought into your experience. Glory not in your outward life or home-life. Glory not in any other life than this: that you know God, and that you know him to be a God of loving kindness and tender mercy.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

What can we bring to thee, O Most High, in whom we live, and move and have our being? What thought is there that is not overmastered by the grandeur of thy conception? What feeling have we which is not lost in the flood of thy nature? Where can our imagination kindle any brightness that is not as darkness compared with the light of thy face? Only in loving thee can we praise thee. Only in those ecstasies which love begets is there pleasure in the ascriptions which we bring. We cannot praise thee by describing thee; for we do not understand thee. We can take no measure of thy being. Though thou art like unto us in many things, yet in many more thou art so large, so transcendent beyond anything to which we have yet attained, that we have unsaid the chiefest things, and thy brightest glory is yet unexpressed.

But thou art a *Father*. Now we know the way. Now we have some conception and measure. What is it that makes our little children dear, that are so far below us? Their love is the sweetest gift which they can bring. Nothing that their hands can take, nothing that their minds can fashion, is so precious as that. But when they draw near to us with the impulse of love, and yield themselves to us with joy and gladness, though we think more than they can think, though we are wiser and stronger than they are, though in every way we are above them, we recognize them, and draw them near to us. And so thou art pleased to take the little ones. Thou art One whose heart, alive to all that is good in our least estate, is sending thy thoughts forth as the dews go forth by night, and as the rains and sunlight go forth by day, and art nourishing in all, all that is good. It is by the power and strength of goodness in thee that evil is repelled. It is by the goodness in us which thou dost rear up and strengthen, that we are able to overcome easily besetting sins, and to maintain ourselves as the sons^s of God. Nor art thou cruel when we transgress thy law, and thou dost chastise us; for, whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. We accept all the penalty, and all the pain, and all the disappointment, and all the suffering of life, not as a measure of divine anger, not as the stern decree of relentless fate; we accept them as the discipline of a God of love, who, by the wisdom and power of love, will yet nourish unto perfection all his household. We submit ourselves to thine hand, and accept the chastisement which thou dost lay upon us, praying only that as our day is, our strength may be also; praying that we may have light to discern, faith to believe, and strength to walk in the right way.

We pray, O Lord our God, that thou wilt grant more and more perfect communion between thyself and us. May we understand thee better by living better ourselves; and out of the experiences of our advanced life may we be able to see more perfectly the glory and the beauty which are in thee. So draw us near thyself through better living from day to day, teaching us how to fend off temptations; teaching us how to eradicate evils, to repent of sins, and to forsake them; teaching us how to be built up in holiness and true godliness unto the end.

Look graciously, O thou Spirit of all mercy and goodness, Jesus, beloved, upon all that are in thy presence; and accept at their hands, this morning, the offerings which they bring. Look not upon the poorness, nor the slenderness of their gifts, but only upon their need and upon thine own riches. Art thou not one who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities? Is not our poverty, and all our wants, whether of body or of spirit, affecting to thee? Be gracious, then, to every one, and teach him to cast his care upon the Lord, who cares for him.

If any have come up hither clouded with evil thoughts, or trouble of

mind, thou that dost by the wind drive storms out of the heaven, shine again royally in us. Canst thou not by the breath of thy Spirit drive all evil thoughts and all suggestions of sadness away from us? If there are any who are disquieted with fear and apprehensions of the future, canst thou not say, "I am the God of the past, and of the present, and of the future"? Yesterday, to-day, and forever, thou art the same. Thou art the same in justice, in purity, in truth, and in love. In thee may we trust.

Are there those who are in great affliction; whose memories are full of poignant suffering? May the Lord be very near to them! Thou that didst comfort the sisters; thou that didst console the mourners; thou that didst call all the weary and heavy-laden to come unto thee, hast thou forgotten the divine art and skill of healing wounded hearts? We commend to thee thine own elect sufferers, marked of thee as thine own by that which they suffer; and we pray that as from the crushing of the grape comes wine, so out of their distresses there may flow forth that treasure of soul and of spirit which shall be unspeakable and inestimable.

We beseech of thee to work in every one inward riches, and inward strength. May our riches consist, not of that which the hands have builded, but of that which God's thoughts and influences have reared up within us.

We pray for all those who are contesting in life, discharging their duties, carrying the burden, bearing the heat of the day, that they may be strong and valiant for that which is right, and evermore seek to promote the Gospel of Christ by raising up that which is truer and truer, and higher and higher in the practice of men. Increase in all a sense of thy providence—of its personality; of its mightiness; of its particularity to their thought and feeling and necessity, so that every one may walk bathed in an atmosphere of divine love.

Draw near to all who are mourning over sin and temptation; all who have wandered; all who have fallen; and all who are discouraged when they look at goodness, to see how high it is, and how far beyond their reach. Look upon those who would be good, but are periled by temptation and overborne by a strength mightier than their own. We pray that thou wilt rescue them, and bring them back with joy and salvation.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt draw near to all those whose thoughts wander away after their beloved. Comfort parents whose children are not doing well. Accept the gratitude of those whose children are an honor and a joy to them. Hear those who come this morning, after sickness or absence, to render thanks to God in the midst of his people. May their hearts know how, as flowers, to send out fragrance and exhale gratitude before thee.

Be near, we beseech of thee to all those who are separated from those best beloved. May they have some sense that their absent ones are under the care of their Father. May they also have some sense of that rest which remaineth for the people of God. What matters it what trial we have laid upon us, or what separations we are called to endure, if we are going to a land where there shall be no more toil and no more separations?

We beseech of thee that thou wilt draw near to any who hunger and thirst after righteousness; to any who yearn and are not satisfied; to any who from day to day desire to enjoy more intimate communion with thee, and to be more mighty in things which are good. We pray that thou wilt fulfill thy promises to all such.

We pray for those who never pray for themselves. We pray for those whose parents are with thee, and who are far removed from the purity and the truth of their youth. We pray for the outcast; for those whom men forget; for those who are trodden down and abused; for those whom selfishness and pride rob; for those who are weighed down by sorrow and shame and degradation.

O Lord our God, help us to cling to our faith in thy fatherhood. Thou art good, and not evil. And yet, what means the suffering of men? The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain yet. Look upon the nations. See their darkness and their distress. O come, if thou art the Redeemer of the world, to rescue the race, to lift up the poor and the degraded, to banish ignorance, and to bring in that light which shall expurgate all the works of darkness throughout the globe. Lift the light of thy countenance upon the struggling peoples of the earth. And may the day speedily come when wars shall be known no more, when oppression shall be forgotten, and when all the earth shall rejoice in common praise, and in the love and unity of the Spirit of God.

We commend to thee thy servant who ministers in holy things in this place, and all those who are grouped together with him in the sacred work which they have in hand. We thank thee for the prosperity which thou hast vouchsafed to thy servant. May he be made mighty in the Scripture, and mightier in the experience of his own heart. May he have the hearts of this people; and may he be able to sow with good husbandry seed that shall spring up and bear fruit in holy living. We pray that thou wilt bless him in his household, and in this place. Prosper him in his labors among this people where they shall seek to establish themselves a home. There abide with him. And from his ministrations may multitudes arise, in the last day, to call him blessed.

We pray that thou wilt look upon all sister churches of every name. Unite thy people. May they have more patience, more gentleness, more charity, toward each other. And grant that at last all the earth may see thy salvation.

And to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, shall be praises evermore.
Amen.

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

O Lord, we thank thee that thou art in the heaven transcendently more glorious than any human imagination can understand. By searching we cannot find thee out, nor understand the Almighty unto perfection. And yet, we know that our mistakes will be in not making thee glorious enough. The depth of thy love, the power of thy sympathy, the sweetness of thy patience, the greatness of thy forgiving mercy, none can understand. Not until we are transferred, not until we ourselves are made better and larger, can we have, in any adequate measure, the conception of our God.

Grant, then, that we may grow in grace, and so in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, until by and by it shall dawn, and we, emancipated from the flesh, become the children of God in very deed, to know as we are known.

Vouchsafe thy blessing to rest upon this flock. Again we hold up before thee, for thy supremest care and blessing, thy servant, their pastor, praying that thou wilt guide his feet safely, and that by and by, when his work on earth shall be accomplished, he may be greeted at heaven's gate by hundreds that have been sent thither by his preaching, and saved.

May we all find the city, and find the gate wide open. May we all find a multitude waiting for us. May we find that our names are known there, and that we are saved. And, desired and drawn by the everlasting tide of love, may we run into the harbor, out of which none shall go again, and where no storms shall fall.

We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. *Amen.*

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